

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



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For Immediate Release

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Press Briefing and Demonstration

**State Fire Marshal Urges Fire Safety at Home
After New Figures Are Released**

**Home Fire Fatalities in Washington Where Drugs
or Alcohol Was Present More Than Quadrupled in 2002**

When: Tuesday, April 8, 2003 11a.m.

**Who: Washington State Patrol Chief Ronal W. Serpas and
State Fire Marshal Mary Corso**

**Where: Washington State's Fire Training Academy
50810 Grouse Ridge Road, North Bend 98045**

Visuals: The Office of the State Fire Marshal will provide a live fire demonstration.

What: Data suggests that people need to be aware of the dangers associated with drinking and take precautions to ensure that they are safe from fire at home: Fire fatalities where drug or alcohol impairment is reported is up an estimated 360% in 2002, according to the State Fire Marshal.

In 2001, 5 of the 60 fire fatalities in Washington indicated alcohol or drug use. In 2002, data shows a 360% increase or 23 out of the 70 fatalities (33%) indicated the possible presence of drugs or alcohol. The highest rate of reported alcohol- or drug-related fire fatalities in 2002 was in Pierce County with five. Kitsap follows behind with 4.

Financial loss in fire-related fatalities that were reported as drug- or alcohol-related was estimated to be \$1,646,000 in 2002. This includes the fires that took place in single-family and in multi-family housing.

The number one cause of home fire fatalities is smoking. People either fall asleep with or drop a lit cigarette. Data also shows cooking accidents, electrical or heating accidents, and arson/suicide as other causes.

Who: Washington State Fire Marshal Mary Corso wants to remind Washington citizens that if they choose to drink at home, they need to take additional safety precautions, especially if they smoke.

“I commend the citizens of Washington who are making choices to not drink and drive, and I commend the State Patrol and advocacy groups for both educating the public on the dangers of drinking and driving and enforcing DUI laws. However, there is also a danger to careless drinking at home. Impaired people not only put themselves at risk, but others, too—their families, friends, and Washington State citizens.”

Background: The Washington State Patrol has made DUI enforcement one of its four core mission areas of emphasis. Seat belts, aggressive driving, and speeding are the other three. In 2002, DUI arrests were up 35% from 2001, the highest in 10 years. This meant 4,803 drunk or drugged drivers were taken off the road. According to Chief Ronal Serpas, “Even with our emphasis on drunk drivers, still today more people are killed on our highways because of an impaired driver than are murdered in our state. We need to be vigilant and continue to remove drunk drivers from our highways. At the same time,” he said, “people need to make safe choices should they drink at home.”

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State, including inspections of state-licensed facilities, plan review of school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State’s firefighters, and collecting emergency response data.

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